

Historic, archived document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.



HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 1939.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

SUBJECT: "DRIED FRUITS". Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Dept. of Agriculture.

--ooCoo--

This week's news letter from the Bureau of Home Economics in Washington is all about dried fruits.---A particularly timely topic right now, when for a good many of us fresh fruits are scarce and high priced, and the home canned supply on the pantry shelf is thinning out noticeably.

First here's something on the food value of dried fruits. Naturally we think first of iron, as dried fruits furnish more iron, weight for weight, than fresh fruits. Dried apricots are especially rich in iron. In fact we can count on nearly all of the dried fruits, dates, figs, prunes, and raisins, for a good supply of iron.

As to vitamins, prunes, dried apricots, dried yellow peaches, and dates, all have vitamin A, especially the prunes and apricots. And prunes, dates, and figs also supply some of the other vitamins.

But dried fruits lack one important vitamin that fresh fruits have, that is vitamin C or ascorbic acid. This is the vitamin we get so much of in orange juice and tomato juice, and in grapefruit and lemon juice---the one we have to have every day because it cannot be stored in the body. So, if you like to squeeze a little lemon juice over your dish of breakfast prunes, it gives you a pleasant tart flavor, and it gives you some of your day's quota of vitamin C.

And as for where our dried fruits come from, this country not only produces more raisins and prunes than any other country, but nearly all the figs we eat. The 1938 raisin crop established a new all-time high. More and more dates are also grown in the United States, in the hot dry districts of Arizona and Southern California. Date trees require a baking hot sun, rainless skies, but plenty of water at the roots. And date trees, just as in the cases of the Sahara, have to be pollinated by hand. That's one of the things that makes our American grown dates rather expensive. These American grown dates though are choice fruits. They are clean and sanitary according to our American standards.

Now, just a word about how fruit is dried. In California most fruits are baked dry in the hot sunshine. In other States most fruits are dried in evaporators or dehydrating plants.

When the fruit is very dry, it is washed in hot water or steam before it is put into packages. This washing cleans the fruit and also makes it plump and soft. These fruits cook more quickly, but they weigh heavier than the old style dried fruits.

Many of you may want to ask about "sulfuring" fruits---when it is done, and how, and why. Does the sulfur do any harm to the food value?

In the first place, only the light-colored fruits are sulfured, and not all of them. There are both sulfured and unsulfured peaches and apricots. Prunes are not sulfured. And dark-colored raisins and figs are not given this treatment.

You can always find out whether the fruits you buy are sulfured. If they are, you will always find the word "sulfur" some place on the label of the box in which they are packed.

Now about why use sulfur. Sulfuring gives the fruit a clearer, more attractive color. Also, it keeps the fruit from spoiling while it is drying and scares off the insects. In no case, of course, is sulfur powder put on the fruit. The trays of fruit are simply exposed to fumes of burning sulfur just before drying. The sulfur forms a gas called "sulfur dioxide", and the gas passes over the fruit, though a very little bit does cling to the surface.

The quantity of sulfur left in the fruit is hardly ever more than one-fifth of one percent. And when you cook the fruit, some of this very small amount of sulfur passes off into the air.

So far as food experts have been able to discover this very small amount of sulfur does no harm to anybody. Under the present Food and Drug Act the practice of sulfuring fruit cannot be prohibited. But all sulfured fruits must be labeled as such.

Now, about cooking dried fruits, prunes particularly, to make them plump and juicy. There is no one rule that applies to all. It pays to know your prunes. So much moisture has been added to some prunes in packing, that they require only half an hour's soaking. Others are so dry that they must be soaked over-night before they take up enough water to make them plump. Some of the more moist prunes sold on the market are so tender they require no cooking at all, only brief soaking.

Whether you add sugar depends partly on taste, partly on variety of prune. In California very sweet plums are dried, while Oregon and Washington prunes are of the more tart Italian type. A bit of salt always will help "round out" the flavor.

Generally the best way to cook prunes is to wash them carefully in hot water first. Then drop them into boiling water and allow an hour for them to plump up. Next, simmer the prunes in the same water for half an hour, adding a little sugar, if desired, during the last few minutes of cooking. Always use the soaking water for cooking, to save every bit of the fruit flavor and food value.

That's all of the dried fruit news for today.

#####

